

## Chapter 2

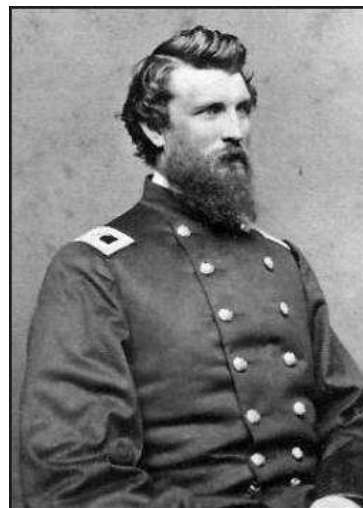
### David Gregg's Story

February 5, 3:00 a.m. – 4:20 p.m.

As ordered, at three o'clock on the cold and dark Sunday morning of February 5, 1865, Maj. Gen. David Gregg's 2nd Cavalry Division (three brigades totaling 6,500 men) moved out of their camps southeast of Petersburg. Thus began Grant's latest offensive, less than 48 hours after Confederate and Union politicians had discussed peace prospects.<sup>1</sup>



**Maj. Gen. David M. Gregg**  
Library of Congress



**Brig. Gen. John I. Gregg**  
Library of Congress

Brigadier General John I. Gregg's brigade led the way with the 13th Pennsylvania Cavalry in the vanguard. John Gregg was the cousin of division commander David Gregg.<sup>2</sup> Next came the brigade commanded by Col. Oliver B. Knowles. Then came the restricted number of ambulances and wagons, with Brig. Gen. Henry E. Davies's brigade bringing up the rear. Forage for the division's horses would travel in wagons accompanying Warren's 5th

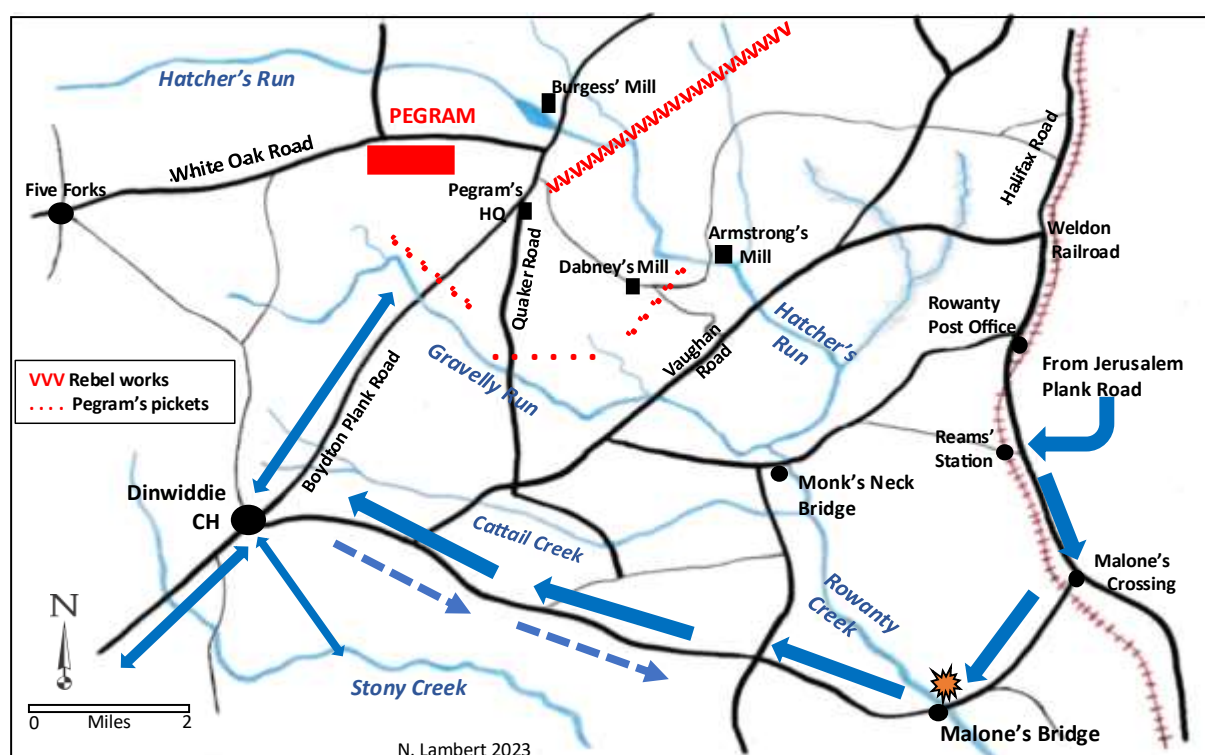
---

<sup>1</sup> OR 46/1: 365-66; Livermore, *Numbers and Losses*, 133.

<sup>2</sup> With David Gregg tendering his resignation before the mission and the shared surname, several chroniclers have erroneously stated that John was the divisional commander at the battle. John Gregg did take over divisional command when his cousin David left the services on Feb 9, *after* the battle. Lambert & Suderow, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run," 36.

Corps for protection. D. Gregg dispatched the 3rd Pennsylvania Cavalry and 6th Ohio Cavalry to the 2nd Corps and 5th Corps, respectively, to screen their movements.<sup>3</sup>

The Union cavalry column snaked southwards down Jerusalem Plank Road, passing Gary's Church, and headed for Reams's Station. David Gregg's mind probably held mixed emotions. His resignation from the army, tendered only a week previously, still awaited ratification. Yet here he rode, leading his troopers toward hostile territory. The large cavalry force passed Reams's Station between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m. With no enemy in sight, they continued south on Halifax Road for a few miles before heading southwest at Malone's Crossing towards Malone's Bridge, spanning Rowanty Creek.<sup>4</sup>



**Map 2.1: Movement of D. Gregg's Cavalry, February 5, 3:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.**

### Scuffle at Malone's Bridge

At around 10:00 a.m., the Yankees encountered enemy videttes about one mile from Malone's Bridge. Upon seeing the approaching mass of Union horsemen, the Rebels quickly joined their compatriots occupying a line of earthworks on the opposite side of Rowanty

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin W. Crowninshield, *A History of the First Regiment of Massachusetts Cavalry Volunteers* (Boston, 1891), 249; *OR* 46/1:371. Knowles was standing in for the usual commander Brig. Gen. Charles H. Smith, who was on leave. Davies was also on leave, returning to his brigade the following morning. Col. Hugh Janeway led the brigade out.

<sup>4</sup> Harold Hand, *One Good Regiment* (Victoria, Canada, 2000), 190; *OR*, 46/1:367-68.

Creek, dismantling the bridge behind them as they crossed. The leading 13th Pennsylvania Cavalry dismounted and deployed on either side of the road. They advanced, dislodged the Confederates from their works, and quickly repaired the bridge. Gregg called up the mounted 2nd Pennsylvania Cavalry, J. Gregg's brigade, and they charged across. The Confederates hastily made for their horses and scattered in every direction, losing one officer and 15 men captured.<sup>5</sup>

The Confederates in question belonged to Companies F and H, 13th Virginia Cavalry. Based at their comfortable winter quarters at Belfield, Rooney Lee's cavalry regiments took turns going on picket duty some 30 miles to the north. To vacate their cozy camp for several days held little appeal for Lee's cavalymen. The Union offensive happened to occur on the 13th Virginia Cavalry watch.

Rebel Pvt. Oscie Crump recalled how they had nearly removed all the bridge planks when the Federals charged. Upon discovering the bridge was damaged, the Union troopers fell back, but they soon returned. Rooney Lee witnessed a fierce firefight at a close distance (30 yards). The Yankees managed to repair the bridge and charged over, scattering the Rebels for half a mile across an open field. Crump claimed that the Yankees captured six Confederates out of a total of 30. Other regimental sources noted that they lost 13 men captured.<sup>6</sup>

Confederate Adjutant John E. Cooke<sup>7</sup> met some of the fleeing Rebels as he returned to Petersburg from an inspection tour at Belfield / Hicksford. As he neared Rowanty Creek, there "suddenly appeared several scattered cavalymen - gray - approaching at full gallop evidently stampeded." The horsemen told him that "a strong force of Federal cavalry had suddenly attacked the small regiment on picket at Malone's and dispersed it, nearly capturing [Rooney] Lee, who chanced to be there inspecting his lines." Cooke now had to adjust his route to avoid the Federals. Later in the afternoon, Cooke caught up with his old friend Rooney Lee. Rooney informed him, laughing, that during the fight at Malone's, he had "very

---

<sup>5</sup> OR 46/1:115, 366-67; Hand, *One Good Regiment*, 190. A vidette is a mounted sentry stationed in advance of a picket line.

<sup>6</sup> Robert K. Krick, *The 9th Virginia Cavalry* (Lynchburg, VA, 1988), 43; Driver, *The 10th Virginia Cavalry*, 68; Daniel T. Balfour, *The 13th Virginia Cavalry* (Lynchburg, VA, 1986), 43; Daughtry, *Gray Cavalier*, 243.

<sup>7</sup> Born into a prominent Virginia family, John Esten Cooke was a novelist writing over 30 books between 1854 and 1886. Related to JEB Stuart's wife, (the sister of Rebel Brig. Gen. John Cooke, who also fought at Hatcher's Run) he had served with Stuart during the war and was well-known to many senior Confederate officers.

nearly been stampeded for the first time in his life.” His horse ‘Fitz Lee’ an “unruly animal of great power,” had whirled round after the enemy’s first volley and nearly carried Rooney off the field.” As he narrated this story, Capt. Robert E. Lee Jr. (Rooney’s brother) and Capt. Phil Dandridge (both of Rooney’s staff) rode up and shared how, surrounded by enemy cavalymen, they had narrowly avoided capture at Malone’s.<sup>8</sup>



**Adj. John E. Cooke**  
wikiedia.org



**Capt. Robert E. Lee Jr.**  
alchetron

Dandridge went on to describe a most unusual encounter. In evading the enemy, he stumbled upon some foot soldiers clad in dark blue marching south. The coats didn’t look like regular Yankee uniforms, and the men carried cutlasses on their belts. As he puzzled over these soldiers and why Federal infantry would be traveling south, an officer spotted him and beckoned him forward. Dandridge nervously approached, and the mystery soon unraveled. The men were a battalion of Confederate marines on a mission to seize a Federal “ram,” steam it up the James River to City Point (Grant’s headquarters and supply base for all his Petersburg forces), and destroy Grant’s transport fleet. The marines were *en route* to pick up “torpedoes” hidden in woods nearby. Their mission coincided with the Federal advance; remarkably, they had traveled to this spot without encountering enemy horsemen. One of the

---

<sup>8</sup> John E. Cooke, *Wearing of the Gray; Being Personal Portraits, Scenes and Adventures of the War* (New York, 1867), 554-57; Daughtry, *Gray Cavalier*, 243.

marines later deserted and notified the Federals, thus stopping the mission.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, the Federal cavalry continued west towards Dinwiddie CH, staying on the south side of Great Cat-tail Creek. In bitterly cold weather and traveling along terrible roads, they passed deserted Confederate camps but met no more Rebels. The 4th Pennsylvania Cavalry remained behind to guard Malone's Bridge.<sup>10</sup>

#### Disappointment at Dinwiddie CH

Rooney Lee gathered his scattered Rebels (the 13th Virginia Cavalry numbered 100-200 troopers) somewhere along Stony Creek. David Gregg's cavalry arrived at Dinwiddie CH, between 1:00 – 2:00 p.m., only to discover a largely abandoned supply route. The initial intelligence underpinning the entire raid had been outdated. Colonel Michael Kerwin of the 13th Pennsylvania Cavalry recalled finding "but few of the enemy there. A train of army wagons numbering 25, with 100 mules, together with 1 rebel colonel and 3 other officers (one of them having in his possession a rebel mail), were captured." A history of the 10th New York Cavalry, Davies's brigade, described "arriving at the courthouse at one o'clock, the enemy was surprised, and 40 men including a colonel, together with a number of wagons were captured."<sup>11</sup>

As originally ordered, David Gregg fanned out J. Gregg's troopers to see what further damage they could achieve. The 16th Pennsylvania Cavalry scouted north on Boynton Plank Road, with the 8th Pennsylvania Cavalry sent in the opposite direction. The 2nd Pennsylvania Cavalry scouted out the Stony Creek Station Road. However, these sorties yielded little, with only a few more prisoners and wagons added to the meager haul.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Cooke, *Wearing of the Gray*, 557-58; A "ram" was a ship modified to ram into and sink enemy vessels, often using probes tipped with an explosive device (termed torpedoes). Two weeks earlier, on Jan 23, Confederate ships had tried and spectacularly failed to destroy the Union supply base at City Point in what was termed the battle of Trent's Reach. The sabotage mission stumbled upon by Dandridge shows the persistent Confederate desire to strike at the heart of the Union Petersburg operation. The mission was elegantly described in: Ralph W. Donnelly, "A Confederate Navy Forlorn Hope," *Military Affairs: Civil War Issue* (Summer, 1964), Vol. 28, No. 2, 73-78.

<sup>10</sup> OR 46/1:366,369; Noble D. Preston, *History of the 10th Regiment of Cavalry, New York State Volunteers* (New York, 1892), 240.

<sup>11</sup> Cooke, *Wearing of the Gray*, 557; Daughtry, *Gray Cavalier*, 244; claimed Rooney Lee led 80-100 troopers. OR 46/1:368; Preston, *10th Regiment of Cavalry*, 240. Dinwiddie was and remains today the county town of Dinwiddie County. The two-story courthouse was built in 1851 and was the most prominent building at the time. The "Rebel mail" referred to was a formal military dispatch; no further details were given.

<sup>12</sup> Hand, *One Good Regiment*, 190-191; Mohr, *The Corman Diaries*, 516-17; OR 46/1:370.



**The Author Outside Dinwiddie CH, 2024**  
David Lambert

Lieutenant Samuel Cormany of the 16th Pennsylvania Cavalry recalled their northern sortie, capturing ten mule teams, an ambulance, and 25 Rebels. For his part, Cormany, with 20 Yankees, chased after some Rebel scouts wearing Federal overcoats. Cormany and a colleague (similarly clad to the Rebels) hailed their enemy hanging around a barn while the remainder of Cormany's party hid in a ditch, ready to strike. One Rebel tentatively approached. Cormany pretended to be looking for his Mosby colleagues, to which his adversary replied that his party was not with Mosby but were North Carolina scouts. Enticed to come nearer, the Rebel obliged. When less than 75 yards away, Cormany sprung the trap. The hidden Yankees revealed themselves, pointing their carbines at the lone Confederate who duly surrendered. Cormany displayed his uniform insignia and stated his name and rank. He discovered that the Rebel was Adjutant Cook of the 24th North Carolina. After a brief exchange, Cormany ordered two men to escort the captured officer back to the regiment while he and the rest charged up to the barn to see who else they could catch. However, they only found a man of color who informed them that the Rebels had left ages ago, heading back towards Petersburg. Disappointed, Cormany's party returned to their regiment.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Mohr, *The Cormany Diaries*, 516-17. Col. John S. Mosby and his 47th Virginia Rangers were a renowned Confederate guerrilla force. Their daring exploits and ambushes spread fear throughout the AOP, so it is not surprising for Cormany to have Mosby on his mind. In truth, Mosby typically operated further north around Warrenton in a region known as Mosby's Confederacy, Virgil C. Jones, *Ranger Mosby* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1944).



**Lt. Samuel Cormany**  
The Cormany Diaries page 498



**Col. William J. Clarke**  
findagrave.com

Details of what D. Gregg's troopers captured vary across accounts. However, according to Meade's official report, the Federal raid captured "18 wagons and 50 prisoners, including one colonel." A newspaper report confirmed Adjutant Oliver Cook's capture (as Cormany noted) and revealed that the captured colonel was William J. Clarke. Both these officers came from the 24th North Carolina, which at the time belonged to Brig. Gen. Matthew W. Ransom's Brigade of Maj. Gen. Bushrod R. Johnson's Division of the Confederate Fourth Corps<sup>14</sup>

#### The Confederate Defenders

Recently arrived from the Shenandoah Valley, Brig. Gen. Pegram's division protected the ANV's extreme right. His meager force of 2,400 men had to guard the vital Southside Railroad, Boydton Plank Road as far south as Dinwiddie CH, and the strategic locations at Armstrong's Mill and Dabney's Mill to the southeast. The division camps were near Burgess's Mill along White Oak Road. Pegram's headquarters was just five miles northeast of Dinwiddie CH, where the plank road intersected Quaker Road that went due south. Major William P. Cooper, 31st Virginia, recalled how the Union cavalry (presumably the troopers scouting north along the plank road) made a dash on their pickets, capturing a few, and came

---

<sup>14</sup> Lambert & Suderow, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run," 36; *OR* 46/1:151; E. Crapsey, "Special Report," *Philadelphia [PA] The Enquirer*, Feb 9, 1865. Colonel William Clarke had commanded the 24th North Carolina before receiving a serious wound at Drewry's Bluffs on May 15, 1864. He was returning home to continue his recuperation when captured at Dinwiddie CH. Clarke went to prison in Delaware and was released in July 1865. William N. Rose, "The 24th Regiment," in Walter Clark, ed., *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina, in the Great War 1861-65*. 5 Vols. (Goldsboro, NC, 1901), 2:271, 285; William S. Powell, *William John Clarke*, Dictionary of North Carolina Biography. (Chapel Hill, NC, 1979), University of North Carolina Press, NCPedia; Crowninshield, *A History of the First Regiment*, 249.

within ¼ mile of Pegram's headquarters. Called to arms, Col. John Hoffman's brigade set off in pursuit of the Yankee cavalrymen, but to no avail.<sup>15</sup>

### Gregg's Cavalrymen Head for Home

With no more Confederate supply wagons to seize, Gregg's goal now entailed safely returning to Union lines. Colonel Knowles reported that his brigade remained at Dinwiddie CH for about an hour. Other accounts stated that following a short rest, at about 3:30 p.m., the cavalrymen headed back towards Malone's Bridge, which was a secure location, and Rowanty Creek offered vital fresh water for both troopers and horses alike.

At 4:20 p.m., Gregg sent dispatches to Warren and Meade informing them of his day's adventures. He reported that Boynton Plank Road wasn't a significant Rebel supply route and detailed how few wagons and prisoners he had captured. Only one Rebel regiment had opposed his advance. Gregg had learned that Butler's Rebel cavalry had moved south, and the remaining Confederate horsemen remained miles away at Belfield, confirming earlier intelligence. Gregg added that a Rebel courier had allegedly passed through Dinwiddie to summon the cavalry at Belfield. Before leaving Dinwiddie, he had sent a party to the Hargraves house to contact the 5th Corps, but they were not there, although he had since communicated with Warren. He now headed back to Malone's Bridge, where he would bivouac and await further orders before adding, "The roads are so bad that my command can scarcely get along."<sup>16</sup>

We rejoin D. Gregg's cavalry in chapter 7 to discover if they succeeded in reaching safety.

### Analysis

Within 12 hours of commencement, Grant's stated objective had come to naught. There were no bountiful Confederate supplies to intercept. Whatever intelligence he had received, it was outdated. At least, thanks to Meade's intervention, the Union cavalry hadn't made this discovery at Belfield, 40 miles further south. Meade's concern about how politicians and the public would receive such a large mission resulting in few tangible gains, proved well-founded.

---

<sup>15</sup> Sherrill, *21st North Carolina*, 406, 412; David W. Wooddell, *Hoffman's Army: The 31st Virginia Infantry*, CSA (Scotts Valley, CA, 2015), 425; Williams, *Stonewall's Prussian Mapmaker*, 239-40.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel H. Merrill, *The Campaigns of the First Maine and First DC Cavalry* (Portland, ME, 1866), p318; OR 46/2:409-10; OR 46/1:371.

It is illuminating to consider the speed of Gregg's cavalry. Although only approximate, according to the evidence, it took four hours to cover the seven miles to Reams's Station and then three hours to travel the four miles to Malone's Bridge. This feels relatively slow and probably reflects the poor road conditions during a harsh winter. However, they only took two hours to cover the next eight miles to Dinwiddie CH. One wonders how long it would have taken them to reach Belfield, Grant's initial plan, and how much rations and animal forage that would have required.